Social Media in the 2013 Italian Election

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Abstract

In February 2013, over 35 million Italian citizens voted to renew the national parliament and Internet played an important and perhaps decisive role. From the 1st of January to 24 of February we collected data from all official Facebook and Twitter profiles of the presidential candidates. During the same period we also collected the average of political polls for coalitions and the mentions of the same group of candidates in online news media, forum, blog, Twitter and Facebook. We identified the key moments of the campaign and we manually coded the interactions on the social media profiles of the candidates with the aim of understanding the relationship between polls and social media interactions. We will therefore presents an overview on how candidates and their networked publics used social media profiles during the campaign, a general method aimed at identifying key moment in a political campaign using data from the Internet and the qualitative analysis of social media interactions during the identified key moments.

Keywords

Twitter; Facebook; politics; content analysis

Introduction

On February 25 and 26 2013, over 35 million Italian citizens voted to renew the national parliament. For the first time in the history of Italian general elections, Internet played an important and perhaps decisive role. With a campaign totally organized as a mix of online activity and a tour of meetings held in public squares and avoiding any TV show, the "5 star movement" headed by the former comedian Beppe Grillo, a brand new political movement, resulted the most voted party in the Camera dei Deputati (the Italian lower chamber). Never before in history of general election in Europe, a brand new party managed to gather this amount of consensus.

It has been a relatively quick campaign where candidates and coalitions slowly took shapes in late December 2012 after the unexpected end of Mario Monti's government.

In order to study the role that social media played in this electoral campaign we collected data from the 1st of January to 24th of February from all official Facebook and Twitter public profiles of the candidates as well as Twitter and Facebook conversations about them. During the same period of time we also collected the average of political polls for the main coalitions of parties and the mentions of the same group of candidates in online news media, forum, blogs, Twitter and Facebook. Using the latter dataset we identified key moments of the campaign.

Data and Analysis

Starting from this rich but heterogeneous set of data, our study reconstruct the social dynamics that link campaign's major events, online communication and changes in the public opinion as it can be observed through opinion polls.

The process behind the formation and evolution of public opinion is complex and, even if it might probably considered one of the very first question for mass media studies (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955), still largely opaque. Despite some recent enthusiasms about the possibility of social media data

analysis to constitute a major breakthrough in this field (Tumasjan et al 2010), empirical research showed contradictory results in understanding how and if the analysis of digital conversation might be used to understand, or even to predict, political behavior (Jungherr et al. 2011, Giglietto 2012). In this paper we explore, in a critical perspective, the idea of finding a linear correlation between data extracted by online conversations and political opinions. While opinions need time to be formed and to evolve within the public sphere (Habermas 1991), digital conversations and news mentions can burst following any event a dissolve within hours. These data need therefore to be observed and studied within a complex perspective where digital media, communication and public opinion coexist within the same system.

In order to understand how social media have been used during recent Italian campaign and what kind of role they played we observed:

- We identified key moments in the electoral campaign and, for those moments, we manually coded the interactions on the social media profiles of the candidates with the aim of understanding not the qualitative content of the peaks in communication productions.

- We observed the themes emerging in candidates' social media communication in order to describe their online communication style and to see if themes were related to campaign events.

- We defined how each candidate has been able to "occupy" with its own communication activities the global digital communication in order to understand the ability of each coalition to set the agenda.

- We traced and analysed the relationships between Facebook users and Facebook official pages of the candidates in order to understand what kind of bipartite network emerges.

Preliminary results

This multi-level analysis showed many interesting results that can improve our understanding on how to use social media data to understand public opinion. On the one side we found no linear correlation between digital mentions of any politicians and his/her simultaneous result in the polls. While this is largely due to the high level of variance that online mentions can show compared to a slower evolution of opinion polls we saw that in many cases high level of online activity might be due to a critical topic raised against the candidate. To a picks in online or news mentions might correspond a decrease in consensus as measured by opinion polls (and we have seen many cases of this occurring to the biggest Italian centre-left party the Partito Democratico). While this data can be simply considered as an additional tool to support a qualitative analysis of digital content, it appears also that, by cross referencing the trends of online mentions and opinion polls we might produced an indirect sentiment analysis of the digital contents.

Qualitative analysis of the comments addressed to candidates during peaks in online communication confirmed this approach. Moreover it provided more information about online users' behaviors. By analyzing the bipartite graph made by the last 50 status updates published on the official Facebook pages of the candidates and the users who interacted (liked or commented with these) with those content we have been able to observe how, while certain users tend to comment only on a single candidate's page, others tend to be active on more than one page. Following this suggestion we identifies and focused our attention on a special category of users: the "zero likers" or users who created an above the average number of comments in a page and never clicked the like button on a post published by the page owner. This behavior attracted our attention since the effort required by clicking the like button is much lower than the effort required by creating a comment resulting in an average ratio of around 6 likes for each comment in the page we observed.

The analysis of those more active users showed that, with a different level for every candidate, it exists a part of users, largely related to the Five Star Movement, that occupy digital communication platforms not only to support their own candidate but also to use other candidates' official pages in

order to set specific topics. The specific situation of Italian election, with the Five star movement largely focused on online activities led us rising the question if this digital hyperactivity of specific users had to be explained as a centrally planned political strategy to take over digital communication or a more spontaneous phenomenon mainly played by young activists with no central coordination.

While the collected data do not allow us to offer a definitive answer to this question, we can surely say that this behaviors, planned or not, worked in reshaping the scenario of recent Italian political communication, both online and offline.

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Twitter Use during the 2013 Norwegian Elections:
Some Initial Insights

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Abstract

While many of the initial hopes regarding the Internet and its role for political communication have been disproven, the rise of the Web 2.0 paradigm and of social media services such as Twitter has again given rise to similar ideas and claims. This panel presentation will focus on the uses of the aforementioned microblog and its uses during the 2013 Norwegian parliamentary election. Specifically, we focus on three areas of Twitter use. First, Twitter use at the hands of the electorate is assessed by means of analyzing the networks and use patterns of the official election hashtag. Second, politicians' uses of Twitter are assessed in a similar manner. Third, journalists' use of politicians' tweets as sources for news stories. By providing current data regarding political Twitter practices in a country characterized by high Internet use, the presentation provides important insights into these ongoing online developments.

Keywords

Political Communication; Social Media; Twitter; Norway; Election

Introduction

The launch of new communication technologies often gives rise to revolutionary claims regarding its impact on political campaigning. The Internet was no different – through its various phases of diffusion in western democracies, it was often suggested as having the potential to "reshape political communication and campaigning" (Lilleker and Malagón, 2010: 25), producing higher degrees of voter participation (e.g. Jackson and Lilleker, 2009). While more empirically focused efforts have largely disproven the most overly optimistic claims regarding the Internet (see Larsson, 2013, for an overview), the current "version of the web" (Allen, 2012) – Web 2.0 – has yet again given rise to claims regarding increased user participation (e.g. Cormode and Krishnamurthy, 2008; O'Reilly, 2005).

As such, the rise of a new paradigm for web design and use has led to discussions regarding the potential of so-called social media - popular services like Facebook or Twitter – for the purposes of political campaigning (e.g. Wattal et al., 2010). Focusing on the latter of these two online services, the suggested panel presentation will outline the uses of Twitter during the 2013 Norwegian parliamentary elections, taking place on September 6th. Specifically, the presentation will focus on three areas, outlined below.

The case of Norway

In one of the earliest comparative efforts on "web campaigning from a global perspective", Gibson (2004) suggested that "parties in […] Norway have long held a presence in cyberspace" (2004: 104). This online longevity could perhaps stem from the high degree to which Norwegians make use of the Internet not only in their everyday lives (e.g. Vaage, 2012), but also for finding information before a election (e.g. Kalnes, 2009; Karlsen, 2010). In combination with high voting rates, Norway could be considered as an advanced country with regards to all mentioned aspects.

Study design and Methodological considerations

Our efforts are focused on three separate, yet related, aspects of Twitter use during the 2013 Norwegian parliamentary elections. These are briefly described in the following.

#valg13, #valg2013 and so on… Tracking the election hashtag

As the Twitter platform has developed, users have started to amend their practices to get the most out of the service. For example, the uses of hashtags – thematic keywords indicating tweets with similar content – have become popular (e.g. Bruns and Liang, 2012; Small, 2011). Such practices have become common also in the Norwegian context. What is suggested here is a follow-up study from previous work performed during the 2011 regional and local Norwegian elections (Larsson and Moe, 2013; Moe and Larsson, 2012). As Twitter activity during those campaigns was structured using hashtags, a similar approach, tracking and archiving relevant tweets using the YourTwapperKeeper application (e.g. Bruns and Liang, 2012) will be employed. Archiving is scheduled to start during march 2013, when the major political parties are hosting their conventions in preparation for election day on September 6th. The archiving process, inspired by previous research (e.g. Bruns and Burgess, 2011; Larsson and Moe, 2012), will allow for a series of longitudinal analyses of Twitter activity leading up to the election, including, focusing specifically on the communicative aspects of Twitter. Through the uses of so-called @ replies and retweets, Twitter users can connect to each other in different ways. Previous research has indicated that while such uses are indeed present, the employment of the more communicative aspects of Twitter are rather limited (Larsson and Moe, 2013). By comparing previous results with those from the current election, we are in a unique position to provide longitudinal insights into political Twitter use in a country with high degrees of voter participation and Internet use. Moreover, the analysis will focus on what types of individual users choose to take part using the major political hashtags. By assessing the societal roles of the participants, we will insights into whether the service at hand has helped members of the electorate to "bloom into both active and capable citizens" (Christensen and Bengtsson, 2011: 2) or if a more cautious regime is to be preferred.

Politicians on Twitter – broadcasting or reaching out?

While mapping and analyzing the political uses of Twitter at the hands of citizens is certainly of interest, attention must also be paid to the Twitter stylings of the politicians who seek the votes of the aforementioned group. Starting with blogging (e.g. Bichard, 2006), social media was thought to constitute a novel way for elected officials to reach out to their respective electorates – or conversely to function as "just another campaign gimmick" (Lilleker and Malagón, 2010: 26). As for Twitter use by politicians, results have largely been leaning towards a reproduction of traditional campaign tactics – mass communication practices with limited amounts of citizen interaction (e.g. Golbeck, Grimes, and Rogers, 2010). By studying the Twitter use of politicians in the Norwegian election campaign, we will be able to shed light over how these practices are shaped outside of the USA (as suggested by Gibson, 2004; Lilleker and Malagón, 2010; Schweitzer, 2008). Using the previously discussed rationale for data collection, tweets directed at and sent from the accounts of seven political party leaders in Norway are being archived, starting at the end of January 2013. This process will continue until election day, allowing for a large-scale analysis of the Twitter practices of established politicians. As previous research has found differences in online political practices stem from such factors as candidate gender (Druckman, Kifer, and Parkin, 2007), party size (Margolis and Resnick, 2000; Strandberg, 2009), party ideology (R. K. Gibson, Lusoli, and Ward, 2008; Vaccari, 2008) and incumbency status (Druckman, et al., 2007; Schweitzer, 2008), the data to be presented here, gathered over a seven-month period, will provide unique insights into how these explanatory variables hold up in the 2.0 paradigm.

Political tweets as a journalistic source

The spread of stories from Twitter to mainstream media is a growing phenomenon (e.g. Guardian, 2011, Jansen et. al, 2009, Lasorsa et. al. 2011), also in the Norwegian context. When politicians tweet, they are well aware that their audience is not people in general, but societal elites (Enjolras, et. al., 2013). Even though Twitter has received widespread media attention in Norway, it is still mostly used by people with higher education; academics, politicians, journalists, consultants, and only to a smaller degree by younger citizens. By searching for specific keywords in the comprehensive national media archive Retriever during two separate periods (May and August), we will shed light on which political tweets end up as news stories, thus entering the realm of what is sometimes called traditional media. In order to increase our understanding of these processes, we will interview political journalists about their use of Twitter as a source and a research tool. Taken together, our findings will bring insights into the agenda setting potential of political tweets, further elaborating on previous research on journalists as gatewatchers (Bruns, 2003) and what stories from Twitter they identify as newsworthy.

By studying Twitter use during an election campaign from three different perspectives; citizens, politicians and journalists, this panel aims to bring new and valuable findings to the research community. Through our three identified areas, we address topics such as the communicative effect of Twitter during the election season, politicians' use of Twitter and journalistic gatewatching through Twitter.

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#ausvotes Mark Two: *Twitter* in the 2013 Australian Federal Election

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Abstract

In this paper, we explore the use of *Twitter* as a political tool in the 2013 Australian Federal Election. We employ a 'big data' approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methods of analysis. By tracking the accounts of politicians and parties, and the tweeting activity to and around these accounts, as well as conversations on particular hashtagged topics, we gain a comprehensive insight into the ways in which *Twitter* is employed in the campaigning strategies of different parties. We compare and contrast the use of Twitter by political actors with its adoption by citizens as a tool for political conversation and participation. Our study provides an important longitudinal counterpoint, and opportunity for comparison, to the use of *Twitter* in previous Australian federal and state elections. Furthermore, we offer innovative methodologies for data gathering and evaluation that can contribute to the comparative study of the political uses of *Twitter* across diverse national media and political systems.

Keywords

Twitter; politics; Australia; elections; big data

Introduction: The Use of Twitter in the 2013 Australian Federal Election

The 2013 Australian federal election in September 2013 will mark the second time that *Twitter* will be used to a significant extent at the national level in the Australian electoral process, following its use as an additional communications tool in the 2010 election. At that point, although the election already generated a substantial amount of *Twitter* engagement especially under the #ausvotes hashtag (Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Jericho, 2012), *Twitter* was not yet a mainstream tool for political communication in the country (Burgess & Bruns, 2012), and was used mainly by a specific community of cognoscenti to communicate amongst themselves; while *Twitter* was gradually adopted by Australian politicians at this time (Chen, 2012; Grant, Moon, & Busby Grant, 2010)*,* a comparatively small number of politicians and journalists actively contributed to the 2010 #ausvotes discussion.

This has changed in subsequent years: *Twitter* has played a more substantial role in subsequent state elections (see e.g. Bruns & Highfield, 2013; Bruns, Harrington, & Highfield, 2012), as well as in the continuous discussion of political issues through the #auspol hashtag which sees a small number of highly active contributors generate almost a million tweets each year (Bruns & Burgess, 2012). During the Queensland state election campaign in February and March 2012, several candidates and parties showed a significant degree of activity – and highly divergent approaches to using *Twitter* to disseminate information, engage with the electorate, or take the political fight directly to opposing candidates – and were mentioned by a large number of Australian *Twitter* users (Bruns & Highfield, 2013; Bruns, Harrington, & Highfield, 2012). Similar patterns are currently being observed in the Western Australian state election campaign, which is taking place in February and March 2013.

Such political uses of *Twitter* in electoral contexts are set to be amplified even further during the 2013 federal election campaign, contested mainly by the incumbent Australian Labor Party (ALP) government and the conservative Coalition consisting of the Liberal and National Parties. More than two thirds of the 150 current members of the federal House of Representatives had created their own *Twitter* accounts by early 2013, and a substantial number of the candidates contesting the election for

other parties are also active on *Twitter* (*Australian MP Tweets*, 2013). The major parties and party leaders are using *Twitter* to attempt to engage with the Australian public, and several federal ministers and opposition shadow ministers are using the platform actively to argue their points. In a country which counts an estimated two million *Twitter* accounts for a population of some 22 million, *Twitter* has become an increasingly significant campaigning tool.

Methodology

'Big Data' Longitudinal Approach

This paper takes a 'big data' approach to examining the use of *Twitter* during the Australian federal election. Since September 2012, we have tracked and captured all tweets by the known accounts of federal politicians, as well as all tweets @mentioning their account names; this list of accounts is being updated continuously as new accounts become known. Additionally, we have also captured tweets posted to the #ausvotes and #auspol hashtags. This data gathering activity will continue to and beyond the 14 September 2013 election date; at the time of writing, it has already captured several hundred thousand tweets, and (following the pattern established by previous elections) the volume of *Twitter* activity around the election is likely to increase substantially as we move closer to the eventual election date.

Qualitative and Quantitative Analysis: Metrics and Content Analysis

We analyse these data, first, by calculating a series of standard *Twitter* metrics as established by Bruns & Stieglitz (2013). These metrics include the total volume of tweets over time (across the entire dataset, for the politicians' accounts as a group – categorised by party –, and for each individual politician); the volume of tweets of particular types (original tweets, @replies, retweets; tweets containing URLs); and the size of the userbase that engages with the politicians' accounts (subdivided into several categories from lead users to occasional respondents). Additionally, we utilise automated content analysis to identify key themes in the dataset (likely to include current themes of Australian political debate such as climate change, asylum seeker policy, or the management of the economy), and determine their presence in the total volume of tweets over time as well as their prevalence in the communicative exchanges around selected leading politicians. Finally, we also identify and graph the networks of interaction (in the form of @replies and retweets) around the various politicians' accounts. For further comparison, similar metrics will also be calculated for the #ausvotes and #auspol hashtag datasets, following the approaches established in Bruns & Burgess (2011) and Burgess & Bruns (2012).

Research Questions

These analyses provide answers to a number of key research questions. The overview of individual accounts' tweeting activities enables us to develop a typology of different *Twitter* campaigning strategies, likely ranging from mere public relations (posting press releases without further engagement) to direct discussion with voters (through substantial @replying), and building on approaches identified in other, international contexts (see, for example, Broersma & Graham, 2012; Larsson & Moe, 2012; Maireder, Ausserhofer, & Kittenberger, 2012). From this, we are able to 'reverse-engineer' the campaigning decisions made by candidates and their party campaign offices, and to determine whether such decisions are linked to the overall standing of each party, the relative safety of each candidate's seat, or the respective national prominence of individual candidates. We will also explore whether the patterns suggest that different candidates have been assigned different campaigning roles ('presidential' leaders, 'attacking' deputies), and whether specific themes and slogans are being promoted by accounts of different political colours, as identified by Chen (2012) in the case of the 2010 election.

We contrast such analyses of the candidate accounts' own activities with the popular response to these accounts. This provides an indication of whether the level of activity by specific accounts translates into a matching response from the overall Australian *Twitter* userbase, or whether in spite of such efforts the general public continues to talk mainly about (and tweet at) the two party leaders' accounts;

it shows whether the political talking points promoted by the candidate accounts align with the overall themes of tweeting activity around these accounts (and in #auspol and #ausvotes); and it examines the extent to which general *Twitter* user engagement with the politicians' accounts is split along party lines or cuts across such divisions. In each case, we also examine the dynamic evolution of such patterns over the course of the campaign period, in response to political events during this time.

Conclusion: *Twitter* as a Political Campaigning Tool

This comprehensive study of *Twitter* activity around the 2013 Australian federal election provides an important longitudinal counterpoint to studies of the 2010 election (e.g. Bruns & Burgess, 2011; Burgess & Bruns, 2012) as well as subsequent state elections (Bruns, Harrington, & Highfield, 2012; Bruns & Highfield, 2013). Additionally, in the context of a panel which reports on research into the use of *Twitter* during four national elections in 2013 (three of them taking place in the space of just a few weeks in September), largely using compatible methodologies for data gathering and evaluation, it makes an important contribution to the comparative study of the political uses of *Twitter* across diverse national media and political systems.

Acknowledgments

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Networked Politics on *Twitter*: Social Media Use by German Politicians during the Federal Election 2013

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Abstract

In this study we aim to detect interactions among German representatives in the context of the general elections in 2013 using a combination of social network analysis and content analysis. It will be investigated how German representatives adapt Twitter to communicate with citizens, media professionals, political strategists, social movement actors and other politicians. Therefore, we will present differences in representatives' use of Twitter before and during election campaigning. Since the 1st of March 2013, we have collected data from all official Twitter profiles of members of the German Bundestag. Additionally, their reactions on Twitter as well as their adressings by other users through @mentions have been tracked. Through continuous monitoring of the politicians' communication behavior until October 2013 it is possible to compare different phases in this ongoing process. How do politicians regularly use Twitter? Do politicians use Twitter for campaigning and if so what does campaigning look like on Twitter?

Keywords

Twitter; German elections 2013; Politics on Twitter; network and content analysis; networked politics

Introduction

In the 2013 general election, social media use in Germany can be considered as a common campaign practice applied by politicians. Thus, our research focuses on this emerging phenomenon by investigating social media network structures and contents. Twitter already played an upcoming role in the 2009 election and since then the number of German politicians with a Twitter account steadily increased. The fact that more than a third of all representatives of the German Bundestag holds a *Twitter* account in June 2012 shows that *Twitter* gained significant importance in political online communication in Germany. Also other arbitrators such as journalists (Neuberger et al., 2010), social movement actors (Lindgren & Lundström, 2011) and NGOs (Lovejoy & Saxton, 2012) as well as citizens with interest in political communication (Larsson & Moe, 2011) use *Twitter* more frequently than others. So far only a few studies have been carried out to detect the interactional behavior of these actors mostly in the USA (Moe, 2010). This study complements former results by taking the German perspective. The rather corporatistic German state (Hallin & Mancini, 2004) can provide a particular perspective for comparative research in this field. The presented results focus on the interactions of politicians on *Twitter* before and during election campaigning. This study of the network and communicative interrelations among politicians and other actors on *Twitter* contributes to the evaluation of political communication in the networked public sphere on the internet. Recent political events (i.e. plagiarism affair concerning various German politicians, *Wikileaks* and establishment of the Pirate Party in Germany) showed the increasing relevance of social media for public communication also demonstrated by an interdisciplinary debate on the effect of the internet on the change of the public sphere (Benkler, 2006; Neuberger, 2009).

Related Work

The analyses of political communication on *Twitter* can broadly be divided into two perspectives (Gibson et al., 2008, p. 19): Either they focus on the participation of political active citizens which use *Twitter* to gain access to public communication or their emphasis lays on the members of political parties. Only the studies of Larsson and Moe (2011) and Ausserhofer et al. (2012) combine both perspectives so far.

The politicians' use of social media pursues various different objectives depending on which phase of the policy cycle they are in. During election campaigning for examples they presumably want to enhance the political engagement of the public (Grant et al., 2010), spread their political messages (Tumasjan, 2010), publish their opinion on certain topics, convince indecisive voters and attract campaign workers and sponsors. Apart from the election campaigns politicians probably use their *Twitter* accounts to draw attention to certain problems and to interact with the public (Glassmann et al., 2011), to bid for support or to gain knowledge of the wishes and needs of the people they represent. Studies on the political twittersphere in the USA show that politicians mainly use the microblogging service for self-promotion and for one-way communication (Golbeck et al., 2010) rather than to actually interact with the public.

Interestingly politicians get involved with *Twitter* despite the fact that they get only followed by a small percentage of the public. Dimitrova et al. (2011) found out that during the Swedish election campaign in 2010 only 1 per cent of the respondents followed politicians or political parties on *Twitter*. This could be an indication of the problems politicians have to adopt *Twitter* and other social media (Vaccari, 2008). They often come into conflict with the wish to control information about them and their policy and the pressure to engage interactively with the public. Sometimes *Twitter* degenerates into a mere campaign gadget without being maintained permanently (Lilleker & Malagón, 2010).

It also has to be taken into account that *Twitter* is only used by a small percentage of internet users. Only 3 per cent of the German internet users also access *Twitter* (Busemann & Gscheidle, 2011). Other countries show a similar situation (Larsson & Moe, 2011, p. 14) except the USA with a higher percentage of *Twitter* users (19%).

Data and Analysis

Through continuous monitoring of the politicians' communication behavior from September 2012 until February 2014 it will be possible to compare the different phases before, during and after the election campaign for the 2013 general elections in Germany.

The data collected in this project is analysed by mapping the communication networks among the representatives and between them and all other actors @mentioning their account names. In addition a quantitative content analysis is conducted to provide information of the quality of the single interactions. Thus, it is possible to clarify different types of interrelations occurring between the tweeters.

In general, the internet enables a more netlike, participatory and decentralised communication for which reason it can be assumed that the constellations between political actors, journalists and the audience increasingly consist of multifaceted communications and effects that cross each other. Instead of unidirectional single-level mass communication that is more manageable by gatekeepers, the flow of communication in the public sphere on the internet is characterised by increasing mutual and multi-step networks. This study refers to the latter forms of communication on the internet and analyses the integration of political actors in communication networks as well as topic-centered networks and their constellations with other actors. Therefore, all actors in the network are classified by their public role. Their specific interactions with other users are explored by analysing the purpose and focus of their tweets.

The research design allows for fundamental research in both theoretical and methodological respects. By taking into account the phase of the election campaign as well as the routine phase of the representatives' communication on *Twitter*, this project contributes extensively to the comprehension of the dynamic of this communication. A comparison between election and routine phase can provide information about the sustainability of the politicians' use of *Twitter*. Furthermore the application of a relational content analysis that has been adjusted to the results of the network analysis can be considered a methodological innovation (Adam, 2008; Nuernbergk, 2013).

Apart from the content analysis a network analysis will be executed on a large scale data base. The latter also known as mapping technique has been adopted to communication science only in isolated cases (Cormode et al., 2010; Bruns & Burgess 2011).

Research Questions

Our theoretical and methodological approach will lead to answering the following research questions: How do German representatives adapt the Microblogging-Service *Twitter* to communicate with citizens, media professionals, political strategists, social movement actors and other politicians? What topics do they post and connect? And is there a difference in their use of *Twitter* before, during and after election campaigning? Do candidates use *Twitter* for campaigning and if so how does campaigning look like on *Twitter* especially against the background of the networked public sphere on the internet?

Preliminary Results

Throughout march 2013, we found that 235 German representatives created more than 20.000 tweets. A first set of around 4200 individual tweets is going to be comprehensively analyzed in June 2013. The sample for this content analysis will consist of all tweets distributed by German representatives in a specific seven-day-period in March 2013 (20.3.-26.3.). In this selected period, the house was sitting until March 22nd. 208 representatives tweeted or retweeted other tweets at this time. We found specific *Twitter* relations (@mentions, retweets) with 1324 distinct *Twitter* users in these tweets from one week. The results of this content analysis will be complemented by the structural analyses of the routine phase and the election phase.

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